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Alcohol Abuse and Role of Clergy

Adapted from speech given by George Gallup, Jr. at a luncheon sponsored by the Alcohol Information and Action Network of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and by the Department of Church and Society at combined General Assembly Meetings of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., Kansas City, Missouri, May 26, 1979.

All of our surveys of the general public on the subject of drinking and drug dependency point to the inevitable conclusion that alcohol abuse — already our number two health problem — is growing in seriousness. And, unless dramatic and creative steps are taken, we can accurately predict that the 1980's will be adversely affected to an even greater degree than the 1970's by this drug.

You are all familiar with the figures: an estimated 10 million are alcoholics and probably twice that many immoderate drinkers who are potential alcoholics.

It has been estimated that alcohol may be involved in up to one-third of all suicides, half of all murders, and a fourth of all other accidental deaths. The abuse of alcohol is also, as you know, a contributing factor to divorce, broken homes, child abuse, as well as a host of other problems. It is estimated that at least four other people are directly affected by the alcoholic.

Furthermore, alcohol is reported to be related to half of all traffic fatalities. In fact, we find that one person in five admits to having driven when they had too much to drink to drive safely — and the percentage is considerably higher among young males.

The trends are not encouraging. Our surveys, for example, reveal that the proportion of Americans who say that liquor has been a cause of trouble in their families had **doubled** in a four-year period.

In the most recent Gallup Poll on this subject, one person in four (24 percent) says an alcohol-related problem has adversely affected his or her family life. The figure in 1974 was 12 percent. The up-trend since 1974 is recorded among most major socio-economic groups and in all regions of the nation.

The proportion saying liquor has been a cause of trouble is as high as one-third among persons in the study who are separated or divorced. It is also interesting to note that, while our nation has one of the highest rates of alcoholism, we also tend to hold stronger anti-drinking views than most of the rest of the world. For example, 3 in 10 are total abstainers and remarkably, nearly half of all Americans basically *disapprove* of drinking. One in five in this country, in fact, would like to see a return to prohibition.

As you may know, we have conducted numerous Gallup Youth Surveys on teenage attitudes toward alcohol. Indeed, teenage drinking is causing particular concern among experts and parents alike. It has been estimated that 3.3 million youths nationwide have a drinking problem. Many mix liquor and drugs. In addition, a Gallup survey conducted for the Charles F. Kettering Foundation revealed 55 percent of parents of teenagers saying they believed drinking to be a "serious" problem among youth in their communities. And an overwhelming 84 percent favored a required school course on the effects of alcohol and drugs.

Teenagers themselves name alcohol as one of the three most serious problems facing their generation, as revealed by a Gallup Youth Survey. In addition, more than one-third of drinking teens (36 percent) say they sometimes drink more than they should. Among older teens (16 to 18), the figure reaches 43 percent.

It is not difficult to see why alcohol

abuse has become one of the nation's most serious problems:

- * As many as one-half of all parents say they set no guidelines regarding the use of alcoholic beverages by their children. An earlier survey showed four parents in 10 failing to do so in the case of their *teenage* children.
- * One drinker in ten admits that his or her pattern of alcohol use would not be a good model for his or her children to follow, while another 15 percent express uncertainty or do not offer an opinion.

In this respect it is interesting to note that about half of all drinkers say they have no specific rules or guidelines regarding their *own* use of alcoholic beverages.

- * About one person in 12 believes there to be no risks involved with the regular use of alcohol, while another 16 percent express uncertainty or do not give an opinion.
- * About one person in six says he or she would not know where or to whom to turn for help in the event someone in his or her family had a drinking problem.

Certain of the key reasons behind youth problem drinking and alcoholism include the following:

- (1) teenagers see their parents drink, sometimes to excess;
- (2) failure of parents to set guidelines;
- (3) a lack of communication with parents;
- (4) peer pressure.

Whatever the reasons, alcohol abuse among teenagers is producing some grim statistics. It is estimated that six out of every ten accidental deaths among teenagers involve alcohol.

Now I'd like to report to you on preliminary results of the survey of the nation's clergy.

The survey was an attempt to assess the current role of the nation's clergy in helping their parishioners in regard to alcohol-related problems, as well as to gain insight into the clergy's own drinking habits.

Paul C Conley and Andrew A. Sorenson in *The Staggering Steeple*, have this to say about the role of the clergy.

"For most American alcoholics and their families, the local clergyman is the first professional who is asked for help."

It has been pointed out that the clergy can help in three basic respects: (1) in terms of pastoral care for the alcoholic and his or her family; (2) in terms of rehabilitation; and (3) in terms of prevention. Conley and Sorenson emphasize prevention:

"The Church's most important task, in relation to the problem of alcoholism, is prevention. In this area it has a tremendous mother lode of practically untouched opportunity. Organized religion has direct contact with over half the people in the country. This is more than any other non-governmental organization. If a substantial share of the religious organizations in our country would undertake an enthusiastic and realistic program of prevention, America's fourth largest public health problem (many now regard it as number one or two) could be brought under control and hundreds of thousands of persons would be protected from becoming alcoholics."

Indeed, the potential is tremendous. Many experts, however, would agree with the Reverend David C. Hancock, President of Prevention of Alcohol, Inc., that in regard to problems "related to the misuse and abuse of alcohol and other drugs, the religious community seems to be largely silent and immobilized."

Complicating the situation is the fact that attitudes of the clergy themselves toward abstinence and alcoholism often differ sharply. The current survey, for example, shows that some regard alcoholism as a sin or character flaw, or ascribe alcoholism to simply a lack of will power.

Conley and Sorenson write: "It is highly unlikely that the churches can have a significant effect in producing a

healthy alcohol climate in the United States as long as they are so intensely divided over the issue of abstinence."

The clergy interviewed believe by a 2-to-1 margin that their own church or synagogue is not doing enough to help people make wise decisions about the use or nonuse of alcohol. As many as one-fourth of clergy admit they do not feel comfortable in trying to help persons or families where drinking is a problem. A similar proportion say it is difficult for them to speak to their congregations about subjects related to the use of alcohol in our society. Some of this difficulty stems, of course, from a lack of training. Approximately one third of respondents say that in their seminary education they did not receive any training in how to deal with problem drinking or alcoholism. Furthermore, approximately half of all clergy interviewed report that they have not attended any courses, workshops or conferences on alcohol problems since their ordination or graduation from seminary — not a very good record when one remembers that alcoholism is one of our top health problems.

While there is certainly a great deal to be done to bring more of the clergy into the battle against alcoholism and drug abuse, one must never forget the fact that countless lives have been saved by the preventative and counseling efforts of the nation's clergy.

Here are six suggestions which were indicated by the survey data:

1. The clergy should encourage parents to discuss drinking problems with their children. Our surveys suggest that many young people are desperately seeking help and advice from their parents but not receiving it.

2. The figures show clearly the need for more training of seminarians in the area of alcohol abuse and counseling.

3. There is also an apparent need for more involvement of the clergy in post-seminary workshops and programs.

4. Clergy need to speak directly and forcefully on the subject of alcohol — from the pulpit and elsewhere.

5. Dialogue between the "wets" and the "drys" among the clergy should be encouraged, so that misinformation can be dispelled and so that there can be a united front against what some have named the greatest social problem of our day.

As I indicated, some in the clergy are basically unsympathetic to the alcoholic, believing that alcohol is a sin, a character flaw, or a failure of will.

6. A greater "team effort" between parents and clergy would seem called for, a trend similar to the encouraging new trend we are seeing in terms of parents and teachers working together — on problems such as discipline and drug dependency.

MOST WIDELY READ RELIGIOUS MAGAZINES

In a study recently conducted by the PRRC and the Gallup Organization for *Christianity Today* to determine the 10 "most widely read" religious magazines by clergy, evangelical magazines were found to dominate the field.

Topping the list was the evangelical magazine, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, followed by *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* and *MOODY MONTHLY*.

Following are the percentages, based on a total sample of 2058 ordained ministers in the nation:

	All Clergy	Evangelical clergy
CHRISTIANITY TODAY	30%	46%
CHRISTIAN CENTURY	12	1
MOODY MONTHLY	10	22
A.D.	6	1
PULPIT PRESS	5	8
CIRCUIT RIDER (Methodist)	4	2
SOJOURNERS	4	*
ETERNITY	4	6
THE INTERPRETER	3	2
LUTHERAN STANDARD	3	1

* Less than one percent

The Role of Radio and TV in U.S. Society

Adapted from report given by George Gallup, Jr. at the General Convention Dinner given by The Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation, September 12, 1979, Denver, Colorado.

It is a great pleasure and honor to be here this evening to report on the recent survey conducted for The Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation on the topic: *The Role of Radio and Television in U.S. Society*.

By way of background let me point out that the survey was conducted at the instigation of Dr. Caroline Rakestraw who saw such a survey as a unique opportunity to explore the views and seek the direction of the combined clergy and lay leadership of the Episcopal Church (as represented by the attendees at this year's General Convention) on this vital issue.

HOW DO THE CLERGY AND LEADERSHIP OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH (AS REPRESENTED BY THE ATTITUDES OF THIS YEAR'S GENERAL CONVENTION) ASSESS THE ROLE OF RADIO AND TV IN U.S. SOCIETY?

Actually you come down pretty hard on TV (in general) with 6 in 10 saying TV has contributed "a great deal" to declining reading and writing skills.

A similar proportion say TV has contributed "a great deal" to increased interest in materialistic goals.

When you are asked to indicate the ways you think TV has had a bad or negative influence on society, here are the top responses.

The top response given — by nearly half the sample — is that television in general promotes and glorifies violence (and the public as a whole shares this view). The other key responses, ranked in terms of frequency of mention, are: TV encourages immorality; it does not edify and encourages triviality; it gives a misleading portrayal of sex; distorts reality; promotes materialism; promotes passivity; interferes with immediacy and close relationships within the family; destroys creativity.

YET WHILE YOU APPEAR TO BE HIGHLY CRITICAL OF TV'S IMPACT

ON SOCIETY IN CERTAIN RESPECTS, YOU — AT THE SAME TIME — HAVE SOME VERY STRONG AND POSITIVE THINGS TO SAY ABOUT TV AND SOCIETY.

When asked to indicate ways you think TV has a good influence on U.S. society, here is what you say:

About half cite the immediate availability of news. Others say TV enhances public affairs awareness; raises consciousness; helps educate the public; brings them the arts, sports; it provides a means of relaxing and escape in our high-pressure society. Others feel that TV can serve to bring families together — through shared experience.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE, OR LESS, OF IN RELIGIOUS PROGRAMMING?

The Episcopal leaders represented here would like to see more movies and plays with a religious message (as many as 8 in 10 say this). Next most often cited are: "panel discussions on religion," and "sacred music". Next are "Bible discussions on religion" and "contemporary music with a religious message".

In what ways could religious programming on radio be improved? The top responses are: 1. higher caliber of theological content, greater educational sophistication; 2. more discussion of issues and relevancy; 3. more music (good religious music, classical).

And on television? The responses are similar: 1. discussion of current events; 2. more imaginative programs, similar to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; 3. more dramatic portrayals of faith (e.g. *Hiding Place*, biographical narrative); 4. more content — higher calibre — more sophisticated, educationally and theologically.

A large majority (7 in 10) of parents of children under 18 put restrictions on the types of programs their children are allowed to watch. And an identical majority put restrictions on the number of hours their children can watch.

In these respects you are far more restrictive than are the nation's parents as a whole.

A remarkably high proportion of the

Episcopal lay and clerical leadership saw all or part of the TV series — in fact, 74 percent.

Among the general public, about one Episcopalian in four viewed all or part of the series.

SUMMARY

1. While you are critical in many respects of the effect of TV on society, you are at the same time keenly aware of the strong points of TV and the tremendous potential for the good of both television and radio.

2. You are clearly "turned off" by some of the current religious programming on radio and television and feel that religious programming should take on new dimensions.

3. You are enthusiastic about developing "movies and plays with a religious message". Indeed this may be the very best way to reach people.

There is also, as seen, support for greater theological and educational content, hard theological discussion, and discussion of current events from a religious perspective.

Actually, many of you seem to feel that religious ideas should not necessarily be dealt with in strictly "religious programs" as we have today, but through drama, movies, biographies, etc.

4. The survey also showed the need for a number of radio personalities, with a strong religious and theological background.

The extraordinary popularity of Pope Paul II (among Protestants as well as Catholics) and of Billy Graham (among Catholics as well as Protestants) reveals in some measure, I believe, the need for inspiring religious figures.

5. There would seem to be a need for local parishes to become much more involved in TV and radio in their communities than they are at present. While one-fifth are involved in certain ways, there is little evidence of heavy involvement and an ongoing relationship.

For copies of the full report (with tables) inquire: Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation, NE/Atlanta, Ga. 30326.

Few Teen-agers Read the Bible Daily

It is something that almost every home has, but which very few teen-agers use.

Some cynical parents might say this description fits the family lawn mower, dishtowel or vacuum cleaner, but the latest Gallup Youth Survey indicates that it applies to something else, as well — the family Bible.

Only one teen in 10, the survey showed, reads the Bible daily, and one-fourth of America's teen-agers never read the book.

Nearly one-fourth of the teens read the Bible at least once a week, but that figure is somewhat misleading, since it may well include those teens who read the Bible in the course of a church service.

The figure of 10 percent of teens who read the Bible daily compares with about 50 percent of young men and women who read a newspaper every day.

Also by way of comparison, some 27 percent of the teens said they are now involved in a Bible study group, compared with 22 percent of America's adults who are participating in the same sort of activity.

Interestingly, the poll showed that the "Bible belt" remains very much a part of American geography, as teens in the South and Midwest read the Bible much more frequently than their counterparts in the East and West. Eastern teens are the least frequent readers, with only six percent of them opening the Bible daily, and fully 35 percent of them never opening it.

The poll found that Protestants read the Bible with greater frequency than do Catholics. While 20 percent of the Protestant teens said they never read the Bible, 31 percent of the teen Catholics said the same.

While boys and girls read the Bible with just about the same frequency, girls

did claim weekly readership in greater numbers than did boys, probably a reflection of the females' more frequent church attendance. And another interesting survey result, non-whites were shown to read the Bible with significantly greater frequency than whites.

Teen-agers whose academic standing is above average were found to read the Bible more frequently than their average or below average counterparts. However, the education and occupation of parents were not found to play an important role in the frequency of Bible readership.

Perhaps predictably, teenage churchgoers were found to be far more likely than non churchgoers were to read the Bible, although it was also found that one in six infrequent churchgoers nonetheless reads the Bible at least once a week. And, even among those who never attend church, 40 percent read the Bible at least on occasion.

Highlights of the survey, based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross-section of more than 1,000 teen-agers ages 13-18, are shown in the chart.

HOW OFTEN READ BIBLE?

	At Daily or more weekly	At least weekly	At least monthly	Less than monthly	Never	Not sure
NATIONAL	10%	24%	13%	20%	25%	8%
Boys	10	19	14	19	29	9
Girls	10	29	12	20	24	5
Both Sexes:						
13-15 years	10	28	13	19	24	6
16-18 years	10	20	14	20	28	8
Whites	9	23	12	20	29	7
Non-Whites	16	29	21	16	13	5
Academic standing:						
Above average	12	25	14	19	23	7
Average or below	8	22	12	20	31	7
Protestant	13	30	14	17	20	6
Catholic	5	17	13	25	31	9
East	6	14	9	25	35	11
Midwest	10	26	14	21	25	4
South	13	34	17	12	17	7
West	12	18	13	21	30	6
Church attendance:						
At least weekly	17	40	13	13	13	4
Less than weekly	5	11	17	27	31	9
Don't attend						
Church	1	3	6	22	60	8

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